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ITEIP Early Intervention Practice Guide

Practice Guide Topic: Evaluation, Assessment, and the Initial IFSP Meeting
(20 U.S.C. 1416(a) (3) (B) and 1442)

Background

Children grow and learn very rapidly from birth to age three. Infants and toddlers have no time to lose when they need early intervention to enhance development and learning. Families of infants and toddlers with disabilities have no time to lose when they need help to support their children as they grow, learn, and develop during the early years.

Research suggests that earlier initiation of services is associated with improved child outcomes. Starting early intervention services as soon as possible requires three essential activities:

- Timely evaluation and assessment of children
- Identification of family priorities, resources, and concerns
- Holding an initial IFSP meeting

An evaluation and assessment must be conducted by qualified personnel using more than a single procedure as criteria for determining eligibility. In the past, ITEIP guidance interpreted “two professionals from different disciplines and two tests or procedures” to mean two norm-referenced, standardized tests. ***This interpretation is changing because it does not allow for obtaining child information that is functional and meaningful! No longer must the two tests or procedures requirement be met by administering two norm-referenced tests!***

This *Practice Guide* is designed to clarify requirements and procedures for meeting the 45 day timeline for timely evaluation, assessment, and initial IFSP meeting, consistent with Washington State’s federal application for Part C funding. (*Section IV–F. Child Evaluation, Assessment & Nondiscriminatory Procedures*, pgs 15 & 16. See link in reference list.)

Timely evaluation, assessment, and initial IFSP meeting refer to:

1. Completion of evaluation to determine eligibility for IDEA, Part C, early intervention services;
2. Child assessment necessary to determine present levels of performance and needs for specific services;
3. Family identification of their own priorities, resources, and concerns, and;
4. An initial IFSP meeting for the child and family within 45 days from referral.

The provision of timely evaluation, assessment, and the initial IFSP ensures eligible infants, toddlers and families access to the services they need. Early intervention services can be initiated *only after* a child has been determined to be eligible and in need of early intervention.



Compliance with the requirement for timely evaluation, assessment, and the initial IFSP meeting involves much more than test scores.

- Evaluation, assessment, an eligibility decision, and an initial IFSP meeting must be conducted *within 45 days of referral*.
- To determine eligibility for Part C services, evaluation of the child's level of functioning must be conducted across all developmental areas including: cognitive, physical (including vision and hearing), communication, social and/or emotional, and adaptive development.
- To develop an initial IFSP, assessment of the child's unique needs is also conducted across all developmental areas, and services appropriate to meet needs are identified.

Evaluation for eligibility and assessment for IFSP development must be:

1. Conducted by qualified professionals trained to use appropriate methods and procedures.
2. Selected so as not to be racially or culturally discriminatory.
3. Administered in the native language of the parents or other mode of communication unless it is clearly not feasible to do so.
4. Based on informed clinical opinion as a component of the process.
5. Inclusive of a review of pertinent records related to the child's current health status and medical history.
6. Provided *at no cost to families*.

- When an IFSP meeting is not held within 45 days of referral, because evaluation and assessment are not completed or for any other reason, the IFSP must include a description of the reason for the late IFSP (e.g., exceptional family circumstances or other reasons).
- **No single procedure is used as the sole criterion for determining a child's eligibility.**
An eligibility decision for Part C services can be made when evidence is provided using one of the following approaches:
 - ✓ Test results from a comprehensive (all areas of development are evaluated), norm-referenced, standardized evaluation **AND** an additional assessment that consists of **either** a medical report documenting a diagnosis that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay, **or** a curriculum-based/criterion-referenced instrument, **or** clinical/professional opinion and observations that identify unique needs in all developmental areas (see link to *Informed Clinical Opinion* document in reference list).
 - ✓ A report provided by medical personnel, identifying a diagnosed physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay **AND** an additional assessment that consists of **either** a norm-referenced, standardized instrument **or** a curriculum-based/criterion-referenced instrument, **or** clinical/professional opinion and observations that identify unique needs in all developmental areas. (See link to *Informed Clinical Opinion* document in reference list.)
 - ✓ When there are no appropriate norm-referenced, standardized instruments available due to the child's age or developmental status, utilize "informed clinical opinion" to identify unique needs in all developmental areas **AND** an additional assessment that consists of



- either** a medical report documenting a diagnosis, **or** a curriculum-based/criterion-referenced instrument. (See link to *Informed Clinical Opinion* document in reference list.)
- The family assessment is voluntary on the part of the family and should be family-directed. A personal interview is recommended to determine the family's resources, priorities, and concerns, and for identifying the supports and services necessary to enhance the family's capacity to meet their child's developmental needs. (See link to *Routines-Based Family Interview format* in reference list.)
 - Evaluation and assessment data must be entered into the ITEIP Data Management System including:
 1. dates of referral, evaluation, and assessment
 2. instruments and procedures used to determine eligibility and assess child needs
 3. an eligibility determination
 4. a description of child strengths and needs in each developmental area

How can programs make more timely and efficient eligibility decisions?

Making an eligibility decision quickly and efficiently increases the time available for the individualized assessment that is needed to identify child strengths and needs, and the family's priorities, resources, and concerns – all within the 45-day timeline. Things to consider:

- Consider establishing in-house timelines for assigning Family Resource Coordinators, completing intake, screening, evaluation, and assessment, and for scheduling of the initial IFSP meeting.
- Consider administering a screening tool to identify those children who need comprehensive eligibility evaluation, and those who most likely do not. Identify a norm-referenced screening instrument that can be administered quickly by personnel without specialized training.
- Screening results cannot be used to make infants and toddlers eligible for Part C services, but can increase efficiency in the evaluation process by "screening out" those whose development seems to be progressing typically. (Written prior notice must be provided to families if decisions are made not to evaluate and assess based on screening results.)
- Use an existing diagnosis of a physical or mental condition that has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay as one criterion for making an eligibility decision. Additional assessment data can be obtained through curriculum-based/ criterion-referenced instruments, and/or clinical/professional observations.
- Select a single, comprehensive instrument that evaluates all areas of development, instead of using separate tools for cognitive, physical, social/emotional, communication, and adaptive areas.
- For those infants and toddlers who cannot be evaluated using norm-referenced and standardized instruments, due to age or developmental status, use informed clinical opinion, at both team and individual member levels as one criterion for determining eligibility. Additional evaluation and assessment information can be obtained through curriculum-based/criterion-referenced instruments, or clinical/professional observations.



What contributes to a meaningful and functional initial IFSP?

With agreement from the parent, conduct a parent interview to learn about family priorities, resources, and concerns as they relate to their child and the development of the IFSP. Conduct comprehensive child assessment (assess all areas of development) to identify strengths and needs related to the development of the IFSP. Things to consider:

- Use authentic assessment procedures such as observation to gather information on the child's functional use of skills in his/her natural environments across settings and situations.
- Use a routines-based parent interview as a means to identify family priorities, resources and concerns related to supporting the child's development in the context of the child's and family's' everyday routines and activities.
- Select a curriculum-based/criterion- referenced assessment that can be used to identify initial strengths and needs, AND to monitor child progress for revising/updating the IFSP.

Online Evaluation, Assessment and IFSP Resources:

- NECTAC: National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center – Part C Eligibility <http://www.nectac.org/topics/earlyid/partcelig.asp>
- NECTAC: National Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center – Informed Clinical Opinion Paper <http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/pubs/nnotes10.pdf>
- Routines-based family interview format – <http://www.siskin.org/index.php?sid=109> (to purchase)
http://www.siskin.org/resources/pdf/Routines-Based_Interview_for_dissem.pdf (PowerPoint)
- Guide to Assessment in Early Childhood: Birth to Age Eight, OSPI
http://www.k12.wa.us/EarlyLearning/pubdocs/assessment_print.pdf
- Washington State's Federal Application for Part C (October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010). Requirements related to a statewide system: Section IV – F. Child Evaluation, Assessment & Nondiscriminatory Procedures, pgs 15 & 16.
<http://www.dshs.wa.gov/pdf/adsa/iteip/Section%20IV%20-%20Requirements%20Related%20to%20Components%20of%20Statewide%20System.pdf>

Prepared by Kristine Slentz & Kellie Horn. Edited by Karen Walker. ITEIP Practice Guides are prepared through ITEIP's training and technical assistance projects, for the purpose of providing early intervention practitioners and other service providers up-to-date information about IDEA Part C requirements, practices and other topics of interest and importance to the field. If you have questions or ideas for future practice guides, contact Kellie Horn at khorn@esd123.org, or Kris Slentz at Kris.Slentz@wwu.edu or Karen Walker walkekj@dshs.wa.gov